



Vascular Surgery

Varicose veins can be painful; Getting specialist advice doesn't need to be

To answer some of your questions about varicose veins we spoke our Consultant General and Vascular Surgeon Mr Dan Higman.

What are varicose veins?

Varicose veins are enlarged and unsightly blue veins that appear on the legs.

How common are varicose veins?

They are extremely common, up to a third of us suffer from them at some stage in our lives.

Who is most likely to get varicose veins?

Varicose veins can occur at any age in both men and women.

What causes varicose veins?

There are many risk factors; they are for example more common in ladies after pregnancy. Other factors include standing for long periods of time and being overweight. Evidence for these risk factors is not conclusive, whilst pregnancy and standing may make the symptoms worse; it's not clear exactly what causes them in the first place. Many people think that varicose veins run in their family. However because they are so common, it is difficult to prove that they have a genetic cause.

What problems do varicose veins cause and are they dangerous?

They often cause discomfort and leave many of us unhappy with the appearance of our legs. However, in most cases varicose veins will never cause any other problems, whether or not they are treated. Over several months or years, approximately 10% of people with varicose veins will go on to develop skin complications. These include eczema, brown pigmentation, thickening of the skin and perhaps even ankle ulceration. It is not possible to predict who will go on to develop these skin problems, but it is a minority.



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How are varicose veins treated?

There are a number of different techniques due to huge developments in technology in the last ten years. This means that almost all procedures are now carried out under local anaesthetic and last just 30-40 minutes without the need for an overnight stay. Speed of recovery is rapid and you should be able to return to normal activities within a few days.

Treatment for varicose veins

Treatment aims to close off or remove the varicose veins. There are a number of treatments outlined below that can be used to achieve this. The correct treatment for you will be discussed with you during your consultation.

Thermal ablation: Radiofrequency Ablation (VNUS) and Laser (EVLV)

Performed under local anaesthetic, a fine tube is passed up the main varicose vein under ultrasound control. The vein is then warmed from the inside using either microwave or laser energy to achieve closure. Other small varicose veins can also be removed under local anaesthetic at the same time if required.

There is very little bruising or discomfort after the procedure and patients can usually return to normal activities the following day. You will be provided with support stockings which you will be required to wear for two weeks after treatment.

Foam Sclerotherapy

Under local anaesthetic the varicose veins are filled with an injection of foam, which is visible in the veins on ultrasound. This foam causes the vein to close over a few days, during which time you will need to wear a bandage on your leg to keep the vein compressed.

Patients can usually return to normal activities the following day. There may be some bruising and mild discomfort, and a minority of patients can have a pale brown mark over the closed vein which may take several weeks to fade.

What should I do if I am concerned about varicose veins?

Seek medical advice. The key to successful treatment is careful assessment and advice given to you by a venous specialist, including an ultrasound scan of the legs.

Or more information or to book an appointment with Mr Higman

T: 01789 412 994

E: enquiry@thestratfordclinic.co.uk